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THE FUTURE WORK AND ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION AND PROPOSALS IN REGARD TO ALL-EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION, PARTICULARLY IN PRIORITY SECTORS, PRIORITY TASKS, GENERAL PRIORITIES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. This report has been prepared to assist the Commission in its consideration, under agenda item 6, of the work of its Principal Subsidiary Bodies since the forty-fifth session in priority sectors, priority tasks, areas of general priority and guiding principles.

2. In paragraph 1 of decision 0 (45) the Commission decided on the following priority areas of activity: environment, transport, statistics, trade facilitation and economic analysis. At its regular forty-fifth session the Commission also designated as a general priority its activities designed to assist countries in transition to a market economy and their integration into the European and the global economy. By its decisions D (42) and I (43) the Commission designated the transport of dangerous goods and EDIFACT respectively as priority tasks. By its decisions G (44) and H (45) it designated sustainable development as a guiding principle for all its relevant activities.

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3. The Commission will review its activities and the implementation of its priorities since the forty-fifth session under agenda item 2(a). The consideration of priority activities under agenda item 6 is intended to be prospective rather than retrospective.

4. A detailed account of the Commission's work designed to assist countries in transition to a market economy and to integrate them into the European and global economy is contained in document E/ECE/1232. The annex to that document contains in tabular form the ECE programme of workshops to assist countries in transition which complements information contained in the present report. An account of the Commission's work on sustainable development is contained in document E/ECE/1236: The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

Environment

5. Pursuant to a resolution (ECE/ENVWA/19) adopted by the Senior Advisers on Environmental and Water Problems meeting at ministerial level on 25 February 1991, signatories of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (E/ECE/1250) will strive for the entry into force of this Convention as soon as possible and seek to implement the Convention to the maximum extent possible pending its entry into force. A meeting of the signatories of the Convention to be convened in December 1991 is expected in particular to make recommendations as regards a work programme for the interim implementation of the Convention.

6. Conscious of the special importance the Commission attaches to the ECE as a forum for the elaboration of regional legal instruments in the field of environment (decision 0 (45), paragraph 2 I (a)) the Senior Advisers urged the Working Party on Water Problems and the ad hoc Working Group to take the necessary steps to finalize, respectively, the draft Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Courses and International Lakes and the Convention on the Transboundary Impacts of Industrial Accidents, respectively, for adoption by the Senior Advisers at their next session.

7. The Senior Advisers will pay special attention to activities which could support environmentally sound development in countries in transition (ECE/ENVWA/18, Annex II, project elements 05.1.1; 05.1.5; 05.1.6; 05.1.7; 05.1.8 and 05.4.5).

8. The Senior Advisers are expected to adopt, at their next session, inter alia, a regional strategy on integrated waste management; principles of establishing environmental product profiles; recommendations to ECE Governments on ecosystems approach to water management; and a code of practice for the conservation of threatened animals and plants and other species of particular concern.

9. The Senior Advisers will examine possibilities for the systematic and analytic reviewing of the performance of individual countries in meeting domestic environmental policy objectives and regional commitments and will consider ways to extend to the ECE region as a whole the system established by OECD for this purpose. The Senior Advisers will also consider opportunities for improving monitoring of the state of the environment throughout the ECE

region in close co-operation with appropriate international bodies such as the European Environmental Agency (EEA).

10. It is expected that at the ninth session of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution a protocol will be adopted on the reduction of emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from stationary and mobile sources. On that occasion the Executive Body will have before it a draft protocol, or at least an outline of such a protocol, for further reduction of sulphur emissions after 1993.

11. Since the Protocol concerning the Control of Emissions of Nitrogen Oxides or their Transboundary Fluxes entered into force on 14 February 1991, negotiations will commence during the coming months on further steps to reduce national annual emissions or their transboundary fluxes (article 2) as well as consideration of procedures to create more favourable conditions for the exchange of technology to reduce emission of NO_x (article 3).

12. Substantive work has been initiated in 1991 concerning persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals aiming at possible future protocols to this Convention on these issues. The critical load concept is expected to become an integral part of abatement strategies for various air pollutants of concern to the Executive Body.

Transport

13. Considering the relevant Commission decisions, in particular D (45) and O (45), the Inland Transport Committee discussed at its fifty-third session future work and activities in its field. Being aware that the development of a single European market and the changes in central and eastern Europe are creating a new situation, it will consider the overall European transport situation. To this end, it will co-operate with other international organizations, in particular the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) and the European Community (EC), in the development of a European transport system including road, rail and inland waterways as well as combined transport. This work, among others, will serve as a basis for creating a harmonized European transport network that will be able to accommodate the significant increase in the demand for passenger and goods transport expected in Europe. Emphasis will also be placed on the distribution of surplus transport among the various modes and will highlight infrastructure needs for the different transport modes, in particular in central and east European countries.

14. Another important future task will be the further development of intermodal transport, which has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years as a result of increasing demands for environmentally sound transport and the limits of road transport crossing the Alps. Great importance is attached to the development of the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC) which will assist in the redistribution of transport demands between the individual modes.

15. The further development and improvement of conventions and agreements governing international transport will continue to be of importance. Particular attention will be given to updating regulations and provisions for

the transport of dangerous goods by road, rail and inland water. The transport of dangerous goods will assume even greater significance in the coming years as society insists upon stricter safety and environmental controls. The agreement governing the harmonization of the construction of motor vehicles will also receive new impetus as its application is extended to cover countries beyond the ECE region.

16. In the field of traffic safety the ECE will make major contributions by continuing to revise the Conventions on Road Traffic and Signs and Signals and raising public awareness of the need for greater road traffic safety. A seminar on this subject and a campaign are foreseen. The impact of transport infrastructure and operation on the environment is an increasing concern of ECE Governments. To reduce air and noise pollution as well as visual intrusion related work will continue, and co-operation with other Principal Subsidiary Bodies as well as other relevant international organizations will be strengthened. In this respect issues of urban transport will be dealt with as well as tourism as a cause of major passenger transport build-ups. Finally environmental and social concerns will be taken increasingly into account when discussing economic considerations of transport. Thus the public's concern and the level of acceptance of different nuisances created by transport will be given full consideration.

17. Work will also continue on two operational projects executed by ECE with financial assistance of UNDP, namely the Trans-European Motorway project (TEM) and the Trans-European Railway project (TER). The axis of the TEM project which was in the past primarily north-south will veer to cover the east-west dimension of fundamental changes in the countries participating in the project. The TER project will become fully operational in the next two years with its Project Central Office based in Budapest (Hungary).

18. The establishment of an electronic data bank will ensure that the Governments and organizations concerned have access to updated information on conventions, agreements and regulations. Necessary hardware and software will be acquired and personnel trained to carry out this work. Eventually this data bank and data-transmittal system will be incorporated into EDIFACT in order to render this more useful to member Governments and the organizations concerned.

Statistics

19. The Conference of European Statisticians will further develop its central role for co-operation among international and supranational organizations through joint activities in the development of statistical methodology, harmonized questionnaires and shared data collection. Co-ordinated activities in statistical methodological development will be ensured by joint meetings. A first round between Eurostat and the ECE is planned for statistics of services, business registers and environment statistics. Similar meetings with the OECD Secretariat are planned on the System of National Accounts.

20. The newly established Intersecretariat Working Groups (ECE/Eurostat/OECD) on energy statistics, environment statistics and transport statistics will continue to harmonize questionnaires and to reduce the response burden for member countries. A joint OECD/ECE questionnaire on indicators of short-term economic changes will be developed.

21. In the framework of the "Intersecretariat Working Group on Co-ordination of Statistical Activities by International Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe", convened under the auspices of Eurostat, the ECE will continue to publish the Newsletter on Transition Projects, and update twice a year its document on "Strategies, priorities and results in the work of statistical offices of transition countries in Europe".

22. An interdivisional team will provide a more effective co-ordination of all statistical activities of the ECE.

23. The secretariat will strengthen its participation in the work of MD6 of the Western Europe EDIFACT Board (EDI for statistics) and will provide information on results to member countries of the ECE.

Trade facilitation

24. In the years to come, trade facilitation will have to address issues raised by the need to maintain the appropriate balance between facilitation and regulation, as tighter regulations might have to be enforced, e.g. to protect the environment (transport of dangerous goods and hazardous wastes) or to ensure the protection of health (control of illicit drugs) or international security (arms control). Such regulatory measures should not, however, create barriers to legitimate international trade. To attain that objective, intergovernmental and inter-organizational co-operation will continue to be needed. Past experience has shown that the ECE has built up a network of activities and contacts which enable it to promote effectively such co-operation.

25. Activities dealing with the commercial and legal aspects of trade facilitation will have to be pursued. Such work should aim at eliminating any constraints on international trade arising from problems of a legal nature or those caused by commercial practice (with particular reference to the use of EDI). This aim could be achieved by ECE undertaking co-ordinating action with all interested parties and, when necessary, carrying out specific projects.

26. Although initially developed to cater for trade data interchange, EDIFACT is now capable of being applied to any form of information interchange in fields which are not necessarily connected to international trade. This will raise the question of the possible enlargement of the scope of activity of ECE EDIFACT-related work to additional fields of application once the main requirements of international trade transactions have been met.

27. Nevertheless, in the years to come message development will remain an important component of EDIFACT work. In view of the increasing number of countries not members of the ECE involved in such development work, the Commission will have to enlarge its co-ordinating and "focal-point" activities to avoid divergencies in standards.

28. EDIFACT implementation, in particular for ECE member countries which are technically less advanced, will require the preparation of educational material, manuals, etc. and the provision of technical expertise - notably to the economies in transition.

29. Since the effective application of EDIFACT will be on a global scale, the five regional commissions with the collaboration of UNCTAD will continue to foster interregional co-operation in the field of trade facilitation, notably EDIFACT.

Economic analysis

30. The secretariat's work on economic analysis will focus on theoretical and practical problems of transformation of central and east European countries into market economies, notably the conditions for such transformation, the relationship between structural change and required economic policies of stabilization as well as appropriate sequencing of systemic change and individual economic policy measures. Another area of special concern, also to be reflected in the work of the Senior Economic Advisers, will be the effects of the ongoing domestic reforms and changes in mutual trade and payments of the transition countries and east-west economic relations. The short- and medium-term impact of the Gulf crisis on certain member countries will be considered. The secretariat will continue its efforts to consider the interrelationship between environmental and economic aspects of developments in the region, especially in respect of economies in transition. With the financial support of UNFPA, research and analysis, including the compilation of statistics, will be carried out concerning international migration in the region in the context of integration and transition processes.

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31. The Commission's other programmes of work, although not currently defined as priority activities, include activities which relate closely to priority sectors, the general priorities or guiding principles of the Commission. These activities are set out below.

Energy

32. The energy programme of ECE will focus on the rational use of energy, sustainable energy developments and assistance to countries in transition. The project "Energy Efficiency 2000" will enter into its operational phase in mid-1991, and a Symposium on the Rational Use of Energy in European Industry will be held in Ljubljana (Yugoslavia) from 30 September to 4 October 1991. The project will increase contacts on trade and co-operation in energy-efficient technologies on the occasion of trade fairs, technical meetings and annual business conventions. It will undertake three more seminars and establish listings of selected technologies, products, services, pilot and demonstration programmes.

33. Issues of energy economy and efficiency in the fields of coal, gas and electric power will continue to receive high attention. During 1991 and 1992 projects will be executed to develop more efficient coal-mining systems, enhance technical progress in opencast mines, improve the rational use of gas and elaborate a compendium on efficient technologies for new and renewable sources of energy.

34. Sustainable energy developments, in particular the relationship between the generation and use of coal, gas and electric power and the climate, are the subject of studies undertaken by the Committee on Energy and its working

parties. Planned studies include the solid-fuel combustion and CO_2 issue, implications of climate change for electricity supply, the interrelationship between gas and climate change and the analysis of energy scenarios for their related greenhouse gas implications.

35. During 1991 assistance to countries in transition will gain momentum. A study "Energy Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe - the First Year" will be published in the spring of 1991. Workshops will be held on the market adaptation of coal industries in central and eastern Europe, on the market adaptation of gas enterprises in central and eastern Europe and the role of prices and tariffs, and on the development of electric power systems, and public acceptance. The impact of economic reforms in central and eastern Europe on institutions and practices in international coal trade will be considered at a meeting of the Group of Experts on Coal Trade and Coal Statistics.

Trade

36. The Committee on the Development of Trade will maintain its emphasis on activities which respond directly to the needs of member countries in transition in three areas: trade policy measures, industrial co-operation and preparation of guides on drafting international business contracts. In the first area, work will concentrate on links between trade and investment; encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises to engage in international trade; and organizing workshops on issues related to the above themes. In the area of industrial co-operation, emphasis will be placed on the means of favouring conditions for foreign direct investments in economies in transition. Priority will be devoted to legal issues related to the problems of the privatization of enterprises.

Agriculture

37. The Committee on Agricultural Problems will pursue its work in four main areas, namely economic analysis of the agri-food sector, relations between agriculture and the environment, standardization in the agri-food sector and quality development, and statistics on food and agriculture. These coincide with four of the five Commission priority sectors, namely the environment, economic analysis, trade facilitation and statistics. The Committee's future work will include workshops on themes of immediate interest to countries in transition. In its work dealing with the maintenance of soil productivity and fertility, the Committee attaches great importance to the guiding principle of sustainable development

Timber

38. The Timber Committee will continue to carry out work in its areas of priority which coincide with four of the five Commission priority activities, namely environment, economic analysis, trade facilitation and statistics. Work has already begun on the fifth European Timber Trends study which relates closely to the priority of economic analysis and projections. The Committee's future activities also include a series of workshops for countries in transition. Given the source of the raw material which is the basis for all the Committee's activities, namely wood from the forest, its activities will,

to a very great extent, continue to be based on the principle of sustainable development. Wood production can only be maintained if the forest is managed in an ecologically and economically sustainable way.

Human settlements

39. The Committee on Housing, Building and Planning has included in its future programme of work, in the light of the socio-economic changes in the region, two major areas of activity, namely sustainable human settlements development and assistance to countries in transition. As a follow-up to its first workshop on rent policies in December 1990, the Committee will organize a second dealing with housing, finance and subsidies in 1991. Further workshops on housing, building and physical planning issues are envisaged in the coming months. The Committee will also prepare a strategy for sustainable development of human settlements. Energy efficiency will be one essential question, since the building sector represents a major energy-saving opportunity and land-use planning, especially in urban areas, could yield long-term savings in terms of better energy efficiency and improved environmental standards.

Industry and technology

40. The Commission's future work will focus on three principal areas, namely statistics, issues of relevance to economies in transition and sustainable development. In the further development of statistics, emphasis will be placed on efficient methods of collecting data for the iron and steel, chemical and engineering industries. Efforts will also be made to improve the ECE's data base in these sectors.

41. Workshops to assist economies in transition will deal with restructuring, privatization and greater efficiency in the steel and chemical industries. The third workshop on rehabilitation engineering to be held in Prague in 1992 will focus on rehabilitation services in the transition countries. In the field of science and technology, emphasis will be placed on R & D policies in economies in transition as well as their national science and technology policies.

42. With regard to sustainable development, work will focus on steel-product quality, the use of scrap, substitutes in detergents, the management of plastic wastes and low-waste processes. A high-level meeting on co-operation and sustainable development in the chemical industry will be organized in co-operation with the European Chemical Industry Federation. Seminars will also be organized on new materials and on foundry production and ecology. Work will also continue on the Inventory of Safety Guidelines in Biotechnology.